Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 16, line 23, with the following rewritten paragraph:

-- Next, a circuit pattern region is recognized from the secondary electron reference image. This circuit pattern recognition can be performed in the same manner that the circuit defect information is obtained in categorization A shown in Fig. 12. Evaluation of killer/non-killer defects is performed by examining the overlap between the recognized circuit pattern area ~~patter areas~~ and the defect area. --

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 16, line 28, with the following rewritten paragraph:

-- In the examples shown in Fig. 15 (a) ~~and~~ to Fig. 15 (d), a defect is a "non-killer defect" if the particle area and the circuit pattern are close but not touching. However, it is also possible to use the image to calculate the distance between the circuit pattern area and the particle area and to change the categorization to "killer defect" if the distance is smaller than a certain value, i.e., if the distance between the circuit pattern area and the particle area is smaller than a certain distance. The same criticality evaluation can be performed for flaw defects in addition to particle defects. This is the automatic classification operation performed in categorization B. --